

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 81

By DeBerry J

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Gwendolyn Sneed for her years of distinguished service on behalf of Tennessee's African-American community.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause in its deliberations to honor and recognize those Tennesseans who have worked selflessly and assiduously on behalf of their fellow citizens; and

WHEREAS, Gwendolyn Sneed was most assuredly one of those Tennesseans who served not only the members of the State's African-American community but all those citizens who hope to enjoy democracy's promised fruits; and

WHEREAS, the first of eight children, Gwendolyn Sneed was the daughter of Mrs. Doris Pauline Sneed and the late James C. Sneed, Sr.; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Sneed graduated from Knoxville College with a degree in Elementary Education; later in life, she chose to continue her education, earning Master of Science degrees in Library Science and Radio and Television Management from the University of Memphis; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Sneed taught in the Memphis public schools for some time after earning her teaching degree and she ultimately attained the level of Master Teacher with the Memphis City Schools; and

WHEREAS, over the course of her life, Gwendolyn Sneed established a strong record of civil rights activism; this record begins in the early 1960s when Ms. Sneed was a student at Knoxville College, when she volunteered for the sit-in movement; and

WHEREAS, after graduating from Knoxville College, Gwendolyn Sneed relocated to Memphis to teach, and she soon joined the Centenary United Methodist Church, which was

then under the leadership of the esteemed Reverend James Lawson, a seminal leader in the movement to secure civil rights for African-Americans; and

WHEREAS, her dedication to Reverend Lawson and the movement led her to leave her teaching position in the Memphis public schools to work as his administrative assistant; and

WHEREAS, in 1972, Gwendolyn Sneed co-founded Operation PUSH Memphis (now known as the Rainbow PUSH Coalition), with which she was closely associated from the time of its inception until her death; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Sneed served that organization as an administrative assistant, an Executive Director, the Chair of its Communications Division, a producer of its Saturday Morning Community Meeting and Weekly Broadcast, and as Coordinator of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday Celebrations; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Sneed worked side-by-side with Reverend Samuel B. Kyles and Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr., when PUSH fought for jobs across the United States; and

WHEREAS, she was instrumental in Reverend Jackson's effort to bring a sanitary sewer system and clean drinking water to the people of Sugar Ditch, a community in Tunica, Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Sneed served as the Rainbow PUSH Memphis Liaison to the Secret Service during Reverend Jackson's two presidential campaigns; and

WHEREAS, along with Reverend Kyles and other PUSH officials, Ms. Sneed participated in a lawsuit aimed at reforming the Memphis electoral system, and this successful crusade resulted in Memphis's first black mayor as well as a more representative City Council and City School Board; and

WHEREAS, deeply concerned over the treatment of minorities by the local media, Ms. Sneed co-founded the Memphis Black Media Coalition (MBMC), an organization dedicated to holding local publishers and broadcasters accountable to the black community in her home city; and

WHEREAS, Gwendolyn Sneed assumed the Presidency of the MBMC, which helped to change the face, content, and culture of what the people of Memphis read, hear, and see; the Coalition influenced the hiring practices of local media outlets, and often challenged broadcast

licenses in order to make television and radio station managers recognize the untoward effects their messages sometimes had on members of the local minority community; and

WHEREAS, in 1998, Gwendolyn Sneed received recognition for her role in organizing the Pilgrimage to Memphis, an event to remember Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the many sacrifices he made to secure civil rights for all Americans; and

WHEREAS, despite a debilitating illness, which she battled courageously in her last days, Gwendolyn Sneed authored "With Liberty and Justice for All?: An Analysis of the Tennessee Waltz and Other Political Corruption Investigations in Tennessee 2002-Present," a study of prosecutions of Democratic lawmakers which she submitted to Congressman John Conyers, Jr.; and

WHEREAS, at the time of her death, Ms. Sneed was a devout member of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, which she served in many capacities, including as a founding member of Manna Outreach, member of the Board of Trustees and the Board of Stewardship, and as a Stewardship Sunday School Teacher; and

WHEREAS, a devout sports fan, Ms. Sneed was known particularly for her enthusiastic support of the Pittsburg Steelers and the Tennessee Titans; and

WHEREAS, she will also be remembered for her love of gardening; her green thumb was often called upon to nurse her friends' ailing plants back to health; and

WHEREAS, Gwendolyn Sneed leaves behind a legacy of passionate and selfless advocacy, and her life's work on behalf of the oppressed and unheard stands as a beacon of truth to the people of Tennessee and the nation; it is wholly fitting that she be formally recognized by this Body; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor the memory of Gwendolyn Sneed, thank her for her years of service to the African-American community and all the people of Tennessee, lament her passing, and express our hope that her example may inspire others to act with the strongest courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.